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AUTHOR Bishop, Robin
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ABSTRACT

The Australian government, employer groups, and the trade union movement acknowledge a critical need to improve work force skills. Focus is on the notion of competencies and measurable learning outcomes. The driving force has been the linking of industry restructuring with occupational classification restructuring (award restructuring). The Australian government, working with employer groups and the trade union movement, has established the National Training Board, which facilitates the progressive introduction of a competency-based approach to vocational training linked to award restructuring. Three other forces are as follows: the Finn Report, which emphasizes that the main purpose of education is economic; closer links with industry and schools that provide articulation of courses so that Australians can follow a path of relevant learning according to their chosen career; and a revised understanding of credentials, with established criteria and recognition of prior learning or current competencies. Postsecondary institutions are not having an easy transition, but many newer universities are developing very comprehensive programs articulating on-the-job experience and in-house training programs with advanced credit into formal courses. Disruptions occur, since the three areas of change at the national level--industry and award restructuring, development of competencies, and a competency-based education thrust--do not move at the same rate. (Appendixes include addresses of seven sources of information in Australia and newspaper articles.) (YLB)

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TOWARDS A SKILLED AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL STANDARDS TO PROVIDE AUSSIE JOE AND AUSSIE JOANNA WITH FLEXIBLE, TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

A PAPER PRESENTED AT

MODULAR TRAINING SYSTEMS:
AN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

WASHINGTON DC
11-12 MAY 1992

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Robin Bishop
Manager, Open Learning
The IPACE Institute
The University of New South Wales
Sydney, NSW, Australia

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In examining Australia's role in setting national standards and portable credentials, let us take as our example the situation of Aussie Joe. Who is he? He's generally a lot more urban than Crocodile Dundee. He is 16-23 years old and he wants a career.

What safeguards are there for the realisation of this ambition? How does Aussie Joe rate his chances of success in the future?

In Australia, changes are occurring at many levels and assistance is forthcoming from several quarters.

In the aftermath of the excesses of the 80's the Federal Government, employer groups and the trade union movement acknowledged a critical need to improve the skills of the workforce. Not surprisingly this was prompted by a recognition that:

- a reliance on the export of primary products, combined with a policy of protectionism, had artificially maintained Australia's economy since federation and did not make Australia competitive in a changing world economy;
- the manufacturing base of the economy had to some degree been neglected;
- many management and work practices were becoming outdated and too inflexible to meet the need of an internationally competitive economy;
- for Australia to become more internationally competitive in the global market there was a need for high productivity and quality in goods and services;
- there was a need to expand and improve the skills base of the workforce;
- many employers had undervalued training.

What has emerged from this is a focus on the notion of **competencies**. This means that attention is now on **measurable learning outcomes**. It indicates a major shift in attitude towards the achievement of recognised competencies rather than how, when or where the learning occurred.

What is supporting Aussie Joe in his quest for a career, and therefore his attainment of competencies?

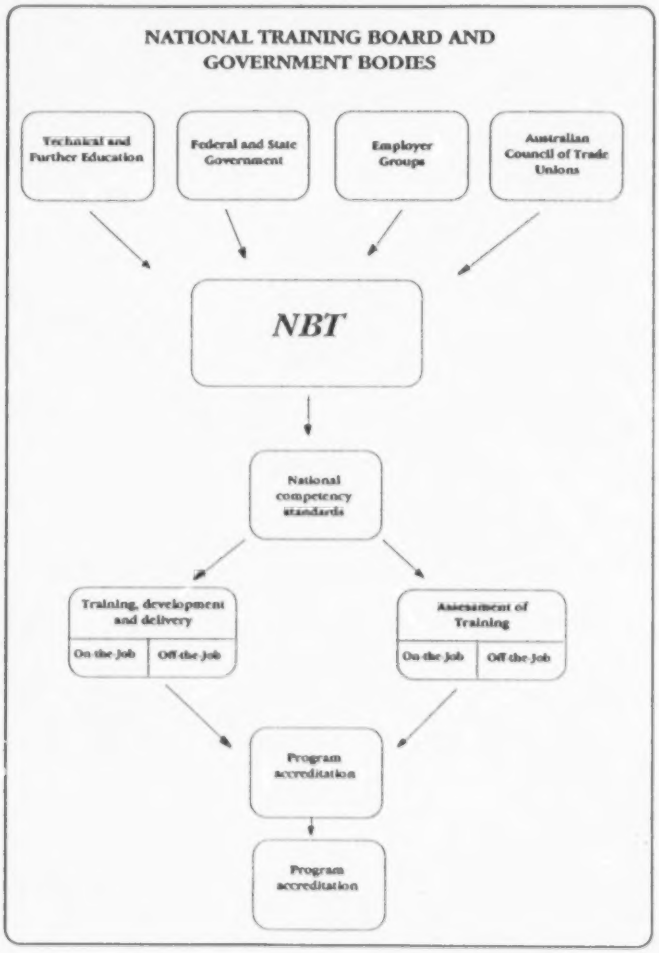
The driving force has been the linking of industry restructuring with occupational classification restructuring (award restructuring). The trade union movement, employers and the government moved towards industry restructuring to meet the challenges of international competition. In Australia an award is a ruling on pay and conditions which employers and employees must follow. They are currently being rewritten or restructured, by defining what broad range of skills a job requires. This will give people like Aussie Joe better career choices and importantly help industries become more efficient.

Many of our awards had become outdated, costly and restrictive. Instead of helping people like Aussie Joe, they inhibited his career mobility. For example, in some industries only a plumber could change a tap washer - something you or I do regularly at home. Increasingly Aussie Joes in a number of industries will have the right to practise that skill. Jobs are being streamlined, classifications modernised and working conditions varied to stimulate flexibility. For example in the metal industry 360 job classifications have been reduced to 14 levels.

Another support for Aussie Joe is the relationship between the federal government and the unions. The obligation to consider the unions is so much part of the Australian context that some explanation is due. Australia is the most highly unionised workforce in the world. Let me point out that although we are a social democracy our Federal Governments over the last 90 years have for the most part been conservative. The prevailing ethos of the Australian worker enshrines the right to work and to be adequately remunerated. In 1908 the federal Government established a centralised wage fixing system known as the basic wage, to ensure that a worker could support a family. That was then, this is now. Aussie Joe and now also Aussie Joanna both expect the same working conditions and awards.

In 1990 with the government, employer groups and the trade union movement working together, the Federal Government established the National Training Board. This Board, with representation from all parties is facilitating the progressive introduction of a competency based approach to vocational training linked to award restructuring.

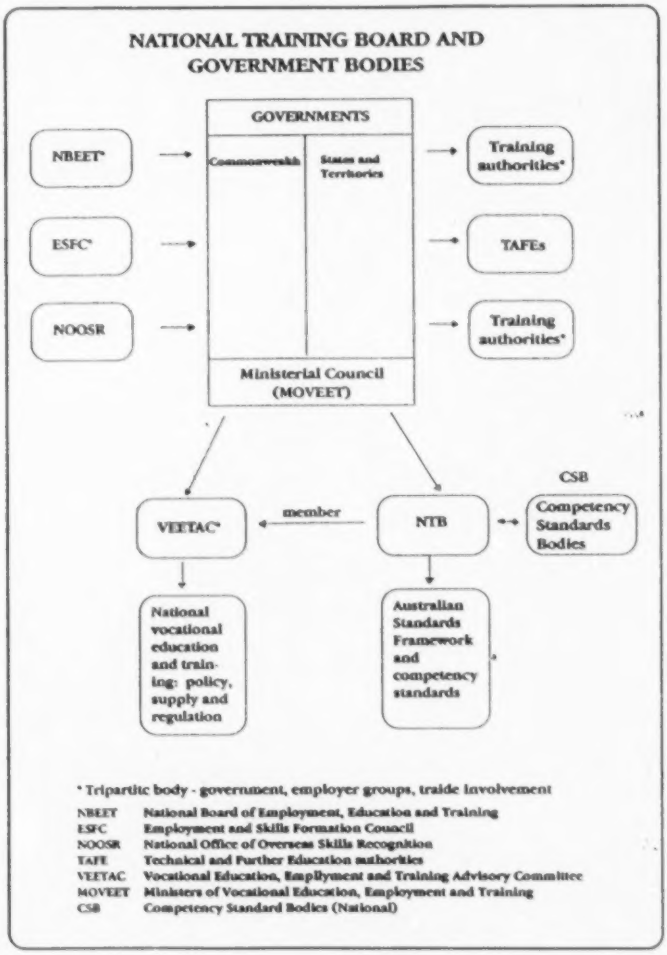
The diagram below shows how this is happening



To complement the National Standards the Federal and State Ministers formed the Vocational Employment, Education and Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC). This committee has begun to implement a nationally consistent framework for the recognition of training. Bodies in each state provide accreditation for courses in the private sector and Technical and Further Education to meet national requirements.

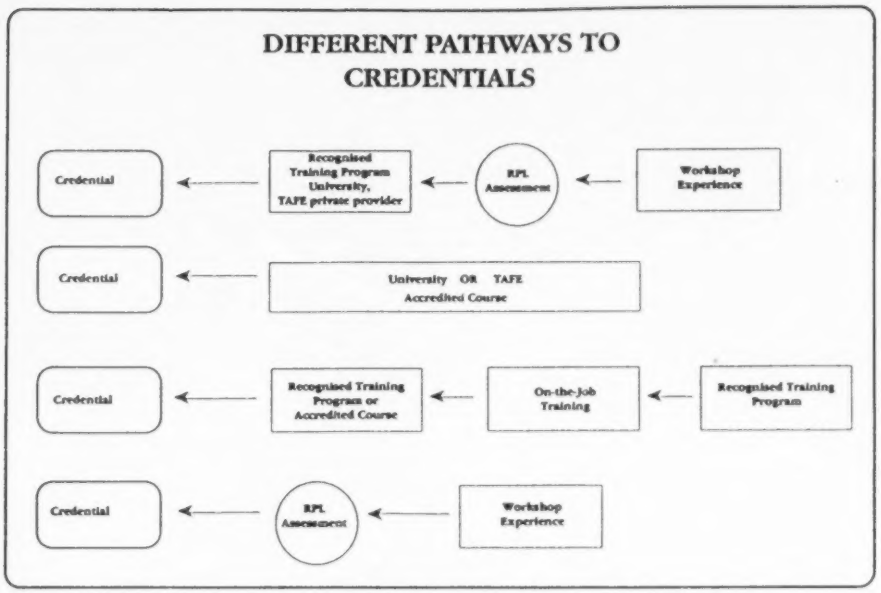
Another force assisting Aussie Joe and Joanna achieve a flexible career path was the Finn Report. Brian Finn of IBM Australia was chairman of the committee created by the Federal and State Governments to make recommendations on the education of younger Aussie Joes and Joannas. The Finn report emphasises the main purpose of education is economic. In future our economy needs broader more transferable skills so Aussie Joes and Joannas can adapt to new technologies and change jobs when they need to. Increasingly, national collaboration to meet the changes means our school education systems are now making closer links with industry ,and national core competency standards are being implemented in a range of curriculum areas.

In the Technical and Further Education area, where much of the vocational training was located, massive changes are being made. The pressure from industry restructuring is changing the nature of vocational training to modular training packages that are competency based. The programs are now being developed nationally and shared across the institutions in each state. The closer links with industry and schools provides articulation of courses for Aussie Joe and Joanna to follow a path of relevant learning according to their chosen career.



Another way of facilitating Aussie Joe and Joanna is a revised understanding of credentials. In this we differ markedly from the USA. To offer a qualification the learning institution must be empowered by state governments to accredit their own courses, or be recognised by an appropriate body in each state such as the Vocational Employment, Education and Training Advisory Board (VEETAB) in NSW. Criteria are established for awarding the credential, and these pay particular attention to the competencies to be covered, method of assessment, recognition of current competencies, and articulation with other programs. The advantages of this are evident. It means somebody who receives a qualification in Western Australia has a commodity that can be put in a briefcase and used in NSW 2,500 miles away.

Another advantage is what we call recognition of prior learning (RPL) or current competencies. This simply means Aussie Joe/Joanna can have their skills and competencies recognised irrespective of how they have been acquired - at school, in the workplace, or through a formal course and receive advanced credit in a course. The diagram below helps explain the different pathways that are now available to Aussie Joe and Joanna.



This move is not an easy transition for some of our tertiary institutions. Not only is it difficult to define competencies and methods of assessment for higher level skills, but it also flies in the face of entrenched academic prejudice. Previously they dictated who they allowed in, what they would give them and when,irrespective of any past experience. As you can see from the attached press cutting some tertiary institutions have a bad case of indigestion in dealing with competency based education. Although this is a difficult area, many of the newer universities are developing very comprehensive programs articulating on-the-job experience and in-house training programs with advanced credit into formal courses.

Here are some examples of how this is working.

At The University of New South Wales, The IPACE Institute, where I work, has combined with all the major national newspapers, including your Mr Murdoch's papers, and the journalists union, to develop a course for sub-editors. This course identifies the standards they should be able to attain and defines the method of assessment. The course is funded by the newspapers, offered nationally, and the credential is a joint award by the employers and the union through the Journalism Education and Training Committee.

The TAFE/FORD Project is an exemplary case-study of co-operation. Ford Australia has, for some time, actively supported the development of a process to recognise prior learning, and acknowledges the need to link in-house training with formal accredited courses. The categories of Management/Supervision and Electronics were selected and the resultant in-house training was linked to courses offered at the Broadmeadows College of TAFE.

An industry/College partnership has developed in the remote mining communities of the Pilbra in northern Western Australia. Karatha College has linked with the major mining employers and the Chamber of Mines and Energy of WA to develop a nationally accredited supervisors' course using an integrateed training model. This involves industry involvement in course development and assessment, recognition of on-the-job learning, and company training programs, with articulation to a formal College course leading to higher qualifications.

The pathway for Aussie Joe and Aussie Joanna seems very rosy. However, there are a few hiccups on the way.

Essentially there are three areas of change at the national level happening simultaneously ,and the mix is not clear yet:

- industry and award restructuring
- the development of competencies - national standards with quality assurance
- an education thrust that is competency based

Not all are moving at the same rate and some disruptions are occurring.

Award restructuring started with the Metal Trades and so far other unions have not been able to make changes.

The identification of competencies in all occupations is a huge task. Competency Standard Bodies are being identified at the national level to take responsibility for this task and Industry Training Councils are involved. Although guidelines are available each Competency Standard Body appears to be approaching the task in a different way. In some areas, such as the electrical trades, it seems this activity is being overtaken by events. Government Departments will only employ contractors who are accredited with the correct International Standard Organisation (ISO) Quality Assurance procedures. These mainly refer to technical standards but include a training component.

In the past, the Electricity Authorities trained their linesmen. With restructuring they are employing trained personnel with ISO accreditation. The Australia competencies being developed are not tried and true and may be overtaken by the ISO Quality Assurance.

The examples I have given of modular training programs articulated with formal courses focus mainly on educational institutions working with particular employers. The competencies identified are for in-house needs and not necessarily those that relate to the national standards that are being developed.

It is early days yet. The movement, formalised in 1990, is one with its eye firmly on the future. Whether this vision is realised will depend on how satisfactorily competencies are defined, standardised and adopted for all occupations and whether education and training can be tailored to meet the demand. While we recognise that this is a lot to ask there is a gathering enthusiasm for these changes. There have been enough breakthroughs already to provide successful models for others to emulate. We wish America well in its move towards the setting of national standards.

USEFUL ADDRESSES IN AUSTRALIA

The National Training Board
GOP Box 2979
Canberra City ACT 2601
Australia
Phone: 61.6.257 1964
Fax: 61.6.257 2719

Development of a national framework for competency standards and ratification of competency standards for each industry

Vocational Empolyment, Education Training Advisory Committee (VEETAC)
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia
Phone: 61.6.276 9170

Committee of Federal and State Ministers to and implement a nationally consistent framework for the recognition of training

The Secretary
The Mayer Committee
Ministry of Education and Training
PO Box 4367
Melbourne Vic. 3001
Australia
Phone: 61.3.628 3485
Fax: 61.3.628 2108

Information on employment related competencies in the review of Young People's Participation in Postcompulsory Education and Training (Set up by the Australian Education Council)

National Board of Employment Education and Training (NBEET)
GPO Box 9880
Canberra ACT 2601
Australia
Phone: 61.6.768111
Fax: 61.6.47 5365

Policy development on all issues relating to national standards at all levels

Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VEETAB)
Department of Industrial Relations Employment, Training and Further Education
Level 21 Remington Centre
169-183 Liverpool Street
Sydney NSW 2000
Australia
Phone: 61.2.261 8158

NSW body to accredit post-secondary courses in TAFE and the private sector and to promote credit transfer between providers

Kate Buchanan
A/Principal
JSSTAFE Unit
NSW TAFE Commission mary Anne Street
Ultimo NSW 2007
Australia
Phone: 61.2.217 3400
Fax: 61.2.217 4025

Information on Joint Secondary Schools project

Ms Melinda O'Connor
Project Officer
Recognition and Assessment Centre
Broadmeadows College
Pearcedale Parade
Broadmeadows Vic. 3047
Phone: 61.3.301 0444
Fax: 61.3.309 5163

Information on recognition of prior learning and the Ford/TAFE Articulation Project

Why 'competency' is all the go

Competency is the new buzz word in education.

SIMON MARGINSON

provides a consumer guide to the jargon.

A NEW word has entered the education and training vocabulary – competency. "Employment-related competencies" first appeared last July in the Report of the Finn Committee, a committee created by the Commonwealth and State Governments to make recommendations on the education of 15- to 19-year-olds. Brian Finn of IBM was chairman of the committee, which included the ACTU's Laurie Carmichael.

After the Finn Committee, the Mayer Committee was set up to develop the idea of competencies. The committee, named after chairman Eric Mayer, former head of National Mutual, has not yet finished its work.

The term "competence" refers to what students have learnt in education and training. It means a combination of knowledge and skills, as measured in tests.

Competence is not just book learning, or the ability to repeat what you have learnt. Competencies are not the same as school subjects.

Competence refers to the ability to apply what has been learned in practice and to transfer it to new situations. It is about what people can *do*.

"Employment-related competencies" means the competencies needed to enter employment. The main concern of those advocating competencies is to improve the preparation of students for work.

The competencies proposed by the Finn Report, all meant to be work-related, are: language and communication; mathematics; scientific and technological understanding; cultural understanding; problem solving; and the personal and interpersonal.

The Finn Report provided guidance on what to include under each competency. For example, "language and communication" includes speaking, listening, reading, writing, gaining access to and using information. "Cultural understanding" includes Australia in context, global issues, and the world of work. "Personal and interpersonal" includes personal management, negotiating team skills, initiative and leadership, adaptability to change, self-esteem, and ethics.

The Mayer Committee is considering three possible extra competencies: creativity (including arts); family and household management; and information technology.

For each of the competencies, ways of measuring and judging student achievement are being developed. This will lead to a ladder of performance standards, ranked in order of difficulty, for each.

These competencies are broad. The Mayer Committee says that each competency will be divided into separate strands.

For example, language and communication would include four strands: collecting, analysing and organising ideas and information; expressing information and ideas to others; interacting with others one to one; working in a team.

The strands would enable teachers to use more detail in simulating the workplace and recording students' results. Each separate strand would have its own performance standards, its own system of measuring student performance, and its own ladder of achievement. Using a battery of tests administered to each student, teachers would draw up a very full report on the levels of competency reached.

This report could then be used when seeking employment, and applying for further education and training. Employers could use the competencies report to choose between different applicants for the same job.

Why competencies?

The Finn Report says that the main purpose of education is economic. In the future the economy will need broader, more transferable skills, so workers will adapt to new technologies, and change jobs when required.

Supporters of competencies say most forms of industry training (ie, apprenticeships) are too narrow because they prepare trainees for only a small number of jobs. Academic education, however, tends to be too far removed from work, and too abstract.

They want to find a new meeting point, although with a bias to the vocational side.

Competencies are meant to be a broad vocational approach used across the whole of education and training, including schools and higher education. The Finn and Mayer committees talk about generic competencies, meaning base level competencies used in all occupations, as listed above.

Schools and the earlier years of TAFE would supply these generic competencies. More specialised training would take place in the later years.

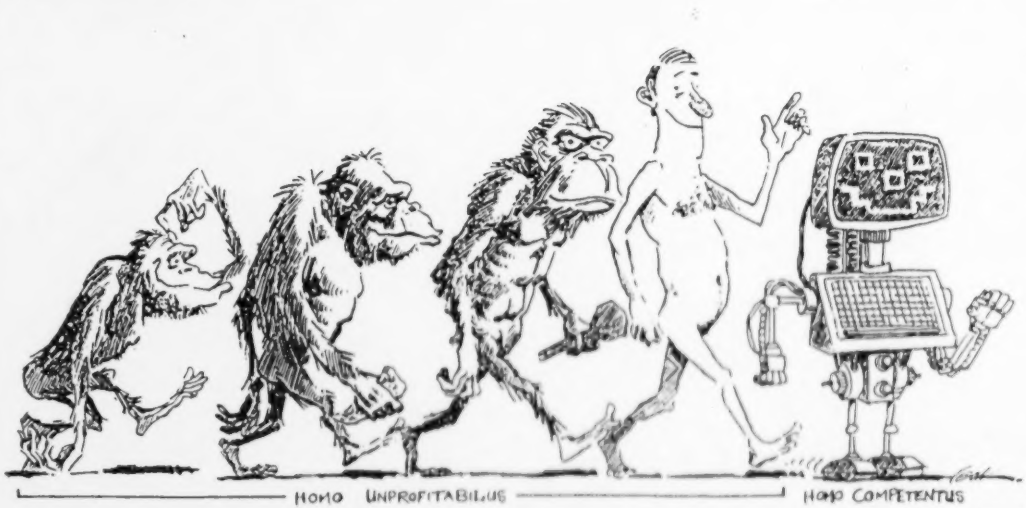


Illustration by BILL LEAR

It has also been suggested that on-the-job work experience should be tested in the same way as education and training, using the competencies framework.

Implications for schools

It is not yet clear how the system of competencies will relate to the subject-based curriculum used in secondary schools. Competencies are different to secondary school subjects.

Subject learning might help the development of some competencies, but the academic curriculum is not explicitly work-based. Unless a competency-based curriculum replaced the existing curriculum there would be two sets of assessment, one for Years 11 and 12 (the HSC) and one for competencies.

If testing in competencies is to become a regular part of the school experience, there will probably be a shift towards a more vocational curriculum, with the traditional academic subjects playing a smaller role.

The Commonwealth Government's Employment and Skills Formation Council recently suggested that strong vocational content and on-the-job work experience should become part of all post-compulsory education, including that provided by schools. Schools and families with a strong concern about preparation for university are likely to resist this. We could end up with a dual system – middle-class schools following the old academic curriculum, and other schools following the competencies approach.

Implications for TAFE

In TAFE and industry training, a student's competency level will decide whether she or he is able to enter training. The level and type of competencies required would vary by industry.

The competencies grid will be aligned to eight levels of skill standard – from junior to postgraduate – now being developed by the National Training Board.

The grid will also be linked to work classifications, and hence wage levels, by restructuring of the industrial awards that govern many occupations. Competencies will be applied even in occupations not governed by award (for example, in the computer industry).

Implications for higher education

The implications for higher education are less clear. No university has yet announced that it will use competency testing within its curriculum, and there are signs that they will refuse to consider the notion seriously.

If higher education finds competencies an alien concept, the academically inclined schools will follow their lead.

Also, if this happens, there will be anomalies among people who work side by side. Most professionals are trained in the universities, but some para-professionals still are not.

If universities do not adopt competencies, then we could get occupations splitting; for example, a dental technician would be subject to competency testing while a dentist would not.

An early test of universities' intentions may come in nursing or teaching.

Many teachers will be required to administer competency testing. They might therefore be prepared to accept a competencies approach to their own profession.

On the other hand, many teachers are critical of the competencies approach on educational grounds because of the weakening of academic learning, and the massive levels of testing required. Experience in the US suggests that education might become dominated by testing, rather than learning.

But everyone's co-operation is crucial to the grand vision of the Finn and Mayer committees – for one national framework for recognition of training and work experience, with one standardised reporting system.

Students might swap freely between schools, TAFE and higher education on the basis of competencies achieved. Workers will be able to use the competencies acquired on the job to enter training at the appropriate level.

Levels of competence will be linked to the level of wages and salary. Workers with the most productive potential or "human capital" will receive the highest pay.

Regular testing on a sample basis will enable the nation to monitor whether competency standards are rising or falling.

Whether this vision is adopted will depend on whether competencies are satisfactorily defined, adopted and also standardised for all of the sectors of education and training. This is a lot to ask.

It will also require standardisation between the States, and a common approach across all industries, which is even more to ask.

Perhaps more fundamentally, there is also the question of whether people will tolerate such a high level of testing and "earmarking" of students and members of the workforce.

Simon Marginson is senior research fellow at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne.

NOTICEBOARD

ACADEMICS at Wollongong University have rejected a tax minimisation scheme which would have put between $50 and $100 a week into their pockets. The package proposed by the university would involve management reducing wages by taking out regular payments, such as mortgages, private superannuation, medical insurance and childcare expenses, before the academics received a pay packet, thus substantially reducing tax payable. The president of the academics' union, Dr Mike Donaldson, said he and his colleagues had chosen "not to join the tax bludgers. We will not join the have-lots, fat cats and tax bludgers. In grim times, such cheap tricks are no longer acceptable. We have said loudly and clearly, and at considerable expense to ourselves, that taking at the expense of others is not on, that greed is not good, that stealing from the public purse is wrong."

IN THE United States, a schoolgirl has been awarded $15,000 in damages from her school for "mental anguish" following claims that vulgar graffiti in the boys' toilets was a daily humiliation, a form of illegal sexual harassment that the people in charge ignored despite a year and a half of complaints. Schools reports *The New York Times* look set to become the next battleground in America's bewildering war between the sexes. "Girls are getting more and more aware of it," said high school student Whitney Casey. "We're sick of men's comments. It needs to stop." The boys, for their part, are getting more and more confused. "Am I allowed to tell Whitney she has beautiful eyes?" asked Adam Saperstein, a classmate. "Where does it start and where does it stop?"

JAPAN Airlines is running a haiku poetry competition for primary school children, the prize being a trip to Japan for the best poet, accompanied by his or her teacher. The haiku is a poetic form which condenses maximum thought into a minimum of language, comprising 17 syllables in three lines of 5, 7, 5. The theme of the haiku, says JAL, is always nature. Entries close on April 3.

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Academics 'trying to derail reforms'

By WAYNE BURNS *

Some of the nation's universities and their senior academics are damaging Australia's efforts to properly educate its population by attempting to derail national vocational education reform through bogy-man arguments about funding and quality.

Warnings by the Australian Vice Chancellors Committee and senior academics, such as La Trobe University's Professor Michael Osborne, that quality and funding to the higher education sector are under threat are merely elitist and paranoid views which sadly reflect the general approach that this country's universities have taken to TAFE and training reform over the past four years.

The contribution of the AVCC and its members to setting and assisting in the design and implementation of the training reform agenda has been spectacular by its lack of constructive and relevant research, support and willingness to see the agenda succeed.

Self-interest has been omnipotent. For example, last year when the then Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr Dawkins, announced the Federal Government's new focus on the TAFE and training area, the AVCC within hours sought immediate clarification that this would not mean cuts to higher education funding.

Coming soon after Mr Dawkins handed over higher education matters to his new junior minister, Mr Baldwin, the new renewed emphasis on TAFE had some vice-chancellors convinced that they were losing influence and that the TAFE agenda would erode their previously powerful lobby for funds.

However, even following Mr Dawkins' immediate guarantee that any increase for TAFE would be new money and not at the expense of the higher education vote, a new concern was discovered and publicly floated.

It was that the quality of teaching and research in our universities was under threat by governments and industry providing better training opportunities for young Australians.

This could possibly be taken seriously if the universities themselves had their own standard or measure of quality which could be used as a yardstick in such a debate.

But vocal, and even some of the more subtle opposition by universities to performance indicators and quality measures, as proposed as part of their profile and funding discussions with the Government, makes it difficult to credibly sustain the erosion-of-quality argument.

It is more than mere conjecture to suggest that what gets up the nose of the higher education leadership is that their "only child" status in relation to national education priorities now has to be shared by a sibling in need of considerable attention.

That TAFE and training reform has captured solid community support, and that following the huge cash injection between 1988-1994 universities may now have to be content to share funding increases with the traditionally financially neglected TAFE, is also rattling a few windows in some ivory towers.

It is also the case that the leaders of some of Australia's oldest institutions hold the view that while training is necessary, it somehow deserves less status and public reverence than the business of higher learning.

Simply ask some of the academics from the newer institutions which were until recently Colleges of Advanced Education about the opinions that academics from the more established universities have towards the newer institutions, and you will get some idea of the academic snobbery that TAFE endures.

While the likes of Professor Osborne, Melbourne University's Professor David Pennington and Sydney University's Dame Leonie Kramer may glean a warm inner glow about what they would like to see as their honourable defence against the encroachment of training into the university sector, higher education institutions have to become a more integral part of the national education and training system.

(It might also add something to the debate to realise that from their inception in Australia, universities have always been vocational trainers. The fact that the courses of medicine and law are studied in the more "traditional" universities to provide work skills and measured competency to doctors and lawyers is more than coincidental!)

The sloth that the more established universities have exhibited in constructing credit transfer arrangements with not only TAFE, but with institutions from the former CAE sector, is proof of their reluctance to embrace and accept the relevance and status of vocational training.

Such snobbery is costing the community millions of dollars annually as students are forced to repeat courses and study to achieve competencies they already hold to satisfy arcane institutional prerequisites or address the refusal of some institutions to accept qualifications or credits awarded by others.

Some of these prerequisites can arguably be justified. A great many can not.

The higher education establishment must realise that it is risking community irrelevance if it fails to recognise and address the community's concerns for a more efficient system of life-long education.

On the issue of funding, the higher education sector must also recognise that it is high time a larger part of the growing federal education budget is allocated to TAFE and training institutions.

Why? For the same reason that universities argued for the huge funding increases during the Dawkins era – national necessity.

Between 1983 and 1991 the number of 15-24 year olds with university degrees rose 43 per cent while the number with trade qualifications fell 11 per cent.

Also, while the AVCC cries foul about the annual 15,000-20,000 shortfall in higher education places and uses this as a funding bat with which to hit the Federal Government, the same shortfall in TAFE is estimated this year to be about 100,000.

As a percentage of our population, apprentices, for example, have declined alarmingly over the past few years and have not increased as a percentage of the teenage population since 1980. And because of this, Australia faces the spectre of another possible major trade skills shortage as it recovers from a recession.

In contrast, in 1983 there were 335,000 students attending Australia's universities. Last year there were 500,000.

The numbers dictate that more attention must be paid to the TAFE system. And economic sanity should dictate that skills gained in this sector must be recognised and accredited in our institutions of higher learning.

*** WAYNE BURNS was an adviser to the former Federal Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Mr Dawkins, from 1988 to 1991.**

Government pushes

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Competency standards not up to the task

The Australian May 6 1992.

By LAURIE GEFFEN, Dean of Medicine Queensland University

THE bottom line of national competency standards (NCS) is the premise that it is possible to describe all the tasks that a particular profession (or trade) undertakes as a series of separate competencies.

If the work of a doctor (or a plumber) can be described by a list of competencies, then you have solved the problem of comparing and registering the various qualifications that can be obtained in the States and institutions of Australia or overseas.

NCS will obviate the necessity for accreditation of courses and for the inclusion of fundamental sciences underlying the discipline if they are not obviously necessary to perform the defined skills of the day.

A checklist of competencies is all that will be needed for registration. Much effort is being expended on a listing of required knowledge and practical skills. However, little attention has been given to the intellectual skills of problem-solving, to professional judgments and attitudes, which are at least as important but far harder to define and measure.

On the surface, NCS seems so reasonable and efficient. But at its roots lie fundamental problems for a society that attempts to regulate its professions as if they were trades, thereby reversing centuries of intellectual evolution that separate medieval trade guilds from the modern professional colleges.

Professional judgments far harder to measure

Professional health education occurs in universities and not in trade schools precisely because human society, human behaviour and the human body are very complex systems. Diagnosis, prognosis and intervention, above all, involve personal judgments that must take into account more than technical skills.

Usually that judgment involves deciding who else has the prerequisite skills. Often no individual has them. In most circumstances, multidisciplinary teams of health-care professionals are far more effective at delivering high-quality health care than multi-skilled individuals trained at a shallow level of competency.

A recent position paper prepared for the National Training Board suggests that the present charter should be widened to include the professions. The primary role of the board at present is to endorse national competency standards for the trades involved in industrial awards. However, the decision of the special premiers conference in July 1991, to accelerate the implementation of the NCS by the end of 1992, has prompted the proposal that the NTB becomes the sole endorsing authority not only for all the trades, but also for all the professions.

When this occurs, universities will need to be specially vigilant and vigorous in defence of their intellectual standards. Without the intellectual skills and attitudes that are cultivated at university, we are liable to produce a breed of health-care professionals whose competencies are locked into the prevailing practices of the day, who do not know what they do not know, and who, when the inevitable march of progress passes them by, will not even be aware that it has happened.

• *Extracted from today's University News, the campus newspaper of the University of Queensland.*

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Revolution sweeping

AT WORK: Mother of four Beverley Roberts ... still uncomfortable wearing a school uniform. Picture: TROY MOORE

"There is no turning the clock back ... schools will become more adventurous."

AT PLAY: Shenanigans in the corridor ... Beverley with her son Jason, 13.

THE revolution taking place inside Australia's education system is one of the great unsung success stories of the past decade. ANITA CATALANO reports.

Mother of four returns to the classroom

BEVERLEY Roberts, 32, still finds it uncomfortable wearing a school uniform every day and sitting in the same playground as her 12-year-old son.

The mother-of-four, of Erina on the Central Coast, is one of more than 900 students enrolled in the State Government's re-entry program.

Mrs Roberts, a Year 11 student at Erina High School, decided to go back to school after the last of her four children started kindergarten.

"The kids were off my hands and I wanted to do something with my life," she said.

Going back to the local high school suited Mrs Roberts's lifestyle rather than night classes at a TAFE college.

"With the cost of babysitters and the inconvenience of my husband being on call sometimes, it was more practical to go to a school," she said.

"Being at school means I'm now home the same time as the kids – and it works out well."

Mrs Roberts now ranks herself in the top 10 in most of her subjects.

"I was a pretty average student at school," she said. "I left in Year 10 and worked in a variety of places, including hospital kitchens.

"But now I'm doing really well in all my subjects, although it's a bit difficult to find time for homework. I'd really like to go to university and study home economics or nutrition."

But she agreed starting school again was difficult. "It certainly took a lot of courage at first and I did get a few remarks but the other students are great," she said.

Mrs Roberts has only one regret.

"The only thing my son won't let me do is to have lunch with him in the playground – I think it's rather funny."

Mrs Roberts and her son Jason are not the only family combination at the school. Principal John Medly said the school also had a father and daughter team.

THE call for Australia to become "the clever country" is working – and at a truly frenetic pace. Across the nation, the number of citizens seeking further skills and better qualifications has triggered an education boom. The extraordinary – and largely unreported – changes have resulted in watershed revisions to the nation's key educational statistics.

For example, in our schools:

- The number of Australian students finishing high school has leapt by 11 per cent in the past two years alone – from 60.3pc in 1989 to 71.3pc in 1991;
- That national record represents an increase of almost 200pc on 1983 figures;
- Last year alone, the proportion (87pc) of government school students completing Year 11 increased by 8pc;
- Since 1988, in NSW alone, 27 new technology high schools, 21 selective schools, 16 language schools and more than 70 centres of excellence have been established.

Similarly, in our universities and colleges:

- The number of students completing higher education (post-high school) courses has skyrocketed by 42pc between 1981 and 1990;
- Since the election of the Hawke Government in 1983, nearly 200,000 extra university places have been created – that's about 17 medium-sized universities.

In short, Australia's education system is booming – and countries such as Hong Kong, China and Papua New Guinea are lobbying to buy a piece as it achieves significant international recognition.

During the past four years in particular, both State and Federal governments have set in train the most fundamental reforms of the public school system in political history.

Former NSW Education Minister Terry Metherell's controversial reforms triggered student riots, mass teacher resignations and loss of subject choice after he implemented recommendations from the Schools Renewal Plan and Scott Report.

But according to his successor, Virginia Chadwick, the controversial proposals have led to the introduction of school councils, global budgeting (in which principals are financial managers) and several other significant changes which have helped revolutionise the education system.

Never before have students and parents been given such a wide choice of subjects, schools and access to 20th century technology.

Curriculum has been overhauled, with the introduction of compulsory languages and vocational courses aimed at keeping children at school. (See report below.)

Mrs Chadwick noted the Government's main initiative was to increase retention rates – through programs such as "Staying On", and the Education and Business Links policy, which fosters industry ties with 440 State schools and local employers.

Part of the NSW Government's retention initiative is the establishment of three new schools designed for students who are not satisfied with the system.

Mrs Chadwick said the Government had earmarked sites in Sydney and the NSW North Coast for the schools, which would operate 48 hours a week and would be jointly managed by TAFE and the Department of School Education.

She said the first school, planned for North Sydney, would enrol two intakes a year and give students the chance to study at TAFE, complete the HSC and work part-time.

"It basically will be a senior college with a lot more vocational options," she said. "It will be a revolution in that we will really test the edges as we are breaking away from the 9am-3pm mould."

Mrs Chadwick said the past four years had brought the most rapid changes in education in living memory.

"The view on schooling and education has changed; we are undergoing a revolution," she said.

"My dream is that we develop enough pathways so that a young person should be able to be at school, get their HSC while studying at TAFE and gaining accreditation for both courses."

But the education revolution is not exclusive to NSW. Federal Education

VISION: Virginia Chadwick.

Govt reveals revolutionary plan

AS part of the NSW Government's Education 2000 statement – released by Premier Nick Greiner last month – about $40 billion will be spent on educating more than 1.5 million students during the next eight years.

The NSW Government's plan for the future includes:

- Students receiving a minimum 13 years' schooling;
- More than half of the HSC students studying at least one of six key Asian languages;
- All primary school students studying at least one Asian language before they start high school;
- The establishment of "quality assurance units" to investigate and monitor schools, curriculum and teaching methods; and
- Education of pre-school students to be co-ordinated between parents and other educational providers.

The revolutionary document – which also outlines a $5 million commitment on trialling video technology in the State's 2,300 schools – will address a variety of areas, including the development of students' knowledge, values, opportunities for further education and technological expertise.

"The document is very important because it defines outcomes that are expected to be evident in NSW schools by the end of the year 2000," said NSW Education Minister Virginia Chadwick.

"A well-educated, creative, imaginative and energetic society is the key to the State's and the nation's future."

Aust schools

Students 'staying on'

JUSTIN Cryer, 17, would probably be on the dole if it were not for his school's revolutionary answer to the HSC. Justin, in Year 12 at Campbelltown High School in Sydney's west, is one of 38 students enrolled in the school's Industrial Practice program. The scheme, introduced as part of the State and Federal Government's Staying On program, is aimed at increasing retention rates and giving students vocational training.

Justin, who works two days a month with a local sign-making company, said the alternative HSC course gave him more confidence. "I won't matriculate to university but I will sit for the normal exam and do the board courses, such as English," he said. "I really would have left in Year 10 if it wasn't for the alternative.

"This has helped me settle down and helped me cope with life after school. I feel advantaged because I'm getting some work skills and it's really helping me play a big part in my future."

Sarah Bona, 17, is also enrolled in the school's performing arts faculty, which is funded by Staying On.

"I think so many more people would have left if it wasn't for the program — it makes school more exciting and there's a lot more incentive," she said.

Staying On co-ordinator Tony Wagner said the school had developed 60-70 vocationally-orientated courses aimed at students who don't want to study at university. He said students enrolled in the alternative program would not matriculate but would sit the normal HSC exams. Mr Wagner said the program had helped keep Year 11 retention rates at more than 90pc.

"We realised there was a need for an alternative HSC because many students were coming back into Year 11 then dropping out because they couldn't cope," he said.

"Although many of them may not want to go to university, they need an HSC for future employment and this program does that."

Board of Senior Studies spokeswoman Dianne Brien said a number of HSC courses aimed at students who wanted employment skills would be introduced next year. Ms Brien said Industrial Studies would be introduced into Year 11 as a result of student demand.

She said the metal, engineering, tourism and hospitality and retail and commerce industries would be taking part in the program.

STAYING ON: Students Sarah Bona and Justin Cryer at Campbelltown High. Picture: TROY HOWE

Minister Kim Beazley said the number of tertiary graduates is expected to rise by 34pc by 1993.

"Obviously, retention rates and making school more vocational is a major priority," Mr Beazley said.

Official figures show that:

● The proportion of 15 to 24-year-olds attending an educational institution has now jumped to 47.9pc — an increase of 4pc on 1988 figures;

● It is now expected that more than 95pc of all teenagers will either be enrolled at school or, more dramatically, studying in full-time post-compulsory education by 1995.

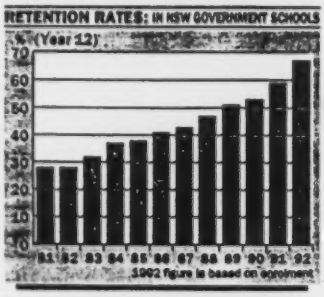
Jackie Keenan, the NSW Department of School Education's Program and Planning director (Metropolitan South West), said retention rates had increased dramatically since the Federal and State government-funded "Staying On" program was introduced three years ago.

Ms Keenan said the program had been introduced as a response to recommendations from the Western Sydney Training Council.

She said 12 schools in the area were involved in the program, along with 1,200 students who were enrolled in the joint TAFE and Secondary Schools program.

"Education is a lot more vocation-orientated these days."

Ms Keenan said today's education system allowed many less academic students to continue on to senior years. "There are a number of students who just won't make it to university and who can be offered these courses," she said.



Campbelltown High School principal Olivia Nicholls said her school, in Sydney's west, had achieved a retention rate of 93pc in Year 11 as a result of offering students alternatives.

"The traditional HSC pattern just doesn't suit a lot of our students. So we are now offering them alternative courses," she said. "Before, the HSC had been traditionally for students wanting to go into university. But a lot of students want to continue on to gain life skills."

The department's Home School Liaison program, introduced in 1988, is also partly responsible for increasing retention rates.

Program manager Eleanor Davidson said that since the program was introduced four years ago, the number of students staying away from school dropped from 22,000 to 8,000 a day.

"In today's education system, we are really listening to what the kids want," she said. "Schools have become more human, as there is much more emphasis on teaching the issues such as drugs, alcohol and AIDS."

Alex Sharpe, NSW Secondary Principals Council secretary, criticised the Government's pace of revolutionary change but said principals could shape their school's future.

"The biggest thing I've seen happen in schools is the responsibility to make our own decisions," she said. "A few years ago schools were monitored closely. But these days we make the decisions and are allowed to put strategies in place."

NSW Opposition Education spokesman John Aquilina admitted a number of the Government's proposals had been positive, but warned that most reforms were destructive to the education system.

"In relation to retention rates, NSW has a percentage of 67 and is still below the Australian average of 71pc," he said. "The drastic measure has been the cut back in teacher numbers and student subject choices. I don't think the Government has done enough for retention rates."

Federation of Parents & Citizens' Associations spokesman Tom Bettle said parents were concerned at the pace of change.

"There has been a revolution in the way local schools have a lot more say. But we would have liked the change to be a little slower," he said.

Professor Ken Eltis, the department's former director of curriculum and educational programs, criticised the way the Government had implemented its reforms, its lack of consultation and negative portrayal of the education system before 1988.

"Are we really on the way to reforming education and shifting the focus on decision-making, or are we concerned more with restructuring the economics of education with a stronger focus on fiscal accountability?" he asked.

Of the government reforms, Prof Eltis stressed he strongly supported the push to give schools greater autonomy and he acknowledged the positive effect of many recent changes.

"Education has really experienced a tremendous turnaround in the way it is requiring schools to accept responsibility," he said. "There is no turning the clock back, as schools will become more adventurous."

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Moving from no job to no hope

Breakdowns of the latest unemployment figures reveal some disturbing trends, particularly for older and less-skilled workers, as MICHAEL MILLETT discovers.

IS this the recession in which the victim's collar has changed from grimy blue to brilliant white? The common perception is that the largely white-collared middle class is the big loser in the current labour market shake-out as employers shift the axe from the factory floor to the office suite.

The perception is based on a premise that employers have been forced to look elsewhere for labour savings after cutting heavily into their blue-collared workforce in the last recession.

There is no doubt that employers have been making big inroads into office personnel over the past two years. The severity of the recession, with its sludgeoning impact on consumer demand and production levels, has left few sections of the labour market untouched. Even the big accounting and legal firms, supposedly immune to the vagaries of the economy, have been forced to shed staff as corporate demand for their services shrinks.

The detailed labour force data from the Bureau of Statistics confirms that the white-collar workforce is suffering considerable pain, particularly those working at the bottom of the office hierarchy. According to the most recent occupational breakdown, the biggest loss in jobs over the past two years was in the clerical division. More than 72,000 clerical jobs disappeared in the 24 months between February 1990 and February 1992 out of a net overall loss for the same period of 159,000. Three-quarters of those lost clerical jobs were held by women.

But the same data also confirms that it is the (usually male) person on the factory floor or work site, rather than the one behind the desk, who has fared worse in the recession. In this respect, the current downturn is little different from its 1982-83 predecessor or from any of the big economic slumps in Australia's history. The low-skilled and semi-skilled workers who were the first to get the chop in 1982-83 were also at the front when the axe fell this time.

Jobs for labourers and related workers, plant and machine operators and drivers – overwhelmingly male – have been heavily cut over the past two years as employers respond to the "double whammy" pressures of a recession and declining protection by further rationalising their blue-collar workforces.

The number of jobs for machine operators and drivers plummeted by 15,400 between February 1990 and February 1992 – a fall of 6.1 per cent, the biggest of any occupational category over the period. Jobs for labourers and related workers tumbled by 50,300 or 4.1 per cent. Even formal qualification proved no protection from the unemployment queue, with the number of jobs for tradespeople dropping 68,000 or 5.6 per cent – the second-biggest percentage fall in the period.

The total job loss for the three blue-collar categories was just over 160,000 – the same as the net loss across all occupational categories. In contrast, the number of professional jobs increased by 42,300 or 4.3 per cent, while jobs for sales and personal service workers rose by 42,200 or 3.8 per cent.

The occupational contrast simply reflects the restructuring taking place across industry sectors during the recession. As in 1982-83, the biggest contractions have been in manufacturing and construction, which happen to be the two biggest employers of blue-collar labour. The manufacturing sector has lost a massive 100,800 jobs since February 1990. This loss represents 8.3 of the 1990 manufacturing workforce while the construction sector lost 98,300 jobs in the same period – 16 per cent of its 1990 numbers. Contrary to the premise, employers had plenty of scope in both sectors to rationalise blue-collar numbers simply by removing the recruitment gains made in the boom period of the late 1980s.

What must be worrying unions is the fact that many of those disappearing jobs will not reappear in the recovery phase, especially in the embattled manufacturing sector. Once Australia's biggest employer, the manufacturing sector now runs a distant third behind wholesale/retail and community services. Its workforce of 1,109,300 has been pruned back to mid-1970 levels and, under the twin pressures of structural reform and lower protection, appears certain to decline further.

While the contraction in manufacturing and construction accounts for the bulk of the lost blue-collar jobs, there have also been heavy losses in primary industry and, surprisingly, in the public sector. Bureau figures breaking down jobless rates according to last jobs held accentuate the dwindling job opportunities for male blue-collar workers. A male whose last full-time job was as a labourer is now enduring a jobless rate of 14.7 per cent, more than three percentage points above the male average.

While much has been made of the difficulty of retrenched managers and administrators breaking back into the labour market, they have an unemployment rate of only 2.2 per cent.

The big change in this recession over its 1982-83 predecessor is in the relative performance of the sexes. While jobless rates among males and females remained fairly similar in the last downturn, they have widened noticeably over the past two years, to the extent that the female unemployment rate (9.7 per cent in March) is more than a full percentage point lower than the male rate (11 per cent).

The unprecedented divergence is due to employers cutting costs in the recession by replacing full-timers (largely male) with part-timers (largely female). Male full-time employment has fallen by more than 230,000 in the past two years while the number of female full-timers has dropped by about 50,000. In contrast, growth in part-time employment has continued unimpeded through the recession, jumping by 128,000 in the same period.

As a recent Bulletin of Labour study showed, the growth in part-time employment cannot be attributed to a shift in employee attitudes. In February 1990, only 25 per cent of males working part-time preferred to work more hours; by February this year, the proportion had jumped to over 40 per cent. The proportion of women part-timers preferring to work more hours has also jumped dramatically over the two-year period.

While it cannot be confirmed by the bureau's figures, there is widespread anecdotal evidence to suggest that many families with jobless breadwinners are now relying on income earned by part-time spouses to carry them through the recession.

Another noticeable development over the past two years has been the increased numbers of older workers showing up in the jobless pool. While there is a perception that young workers, particularly teenagers, have found the going toughest, the fact is that they account for only 13 per cent of growth in unemployment over the period. The biggest percentage jump among jobless looking for full-time work was for those aged 45 to 54. Their numbers leapt from 51,500 in February 1990 to 103,000 two years later – an increase of exactly 100 per cent. The other big jumps were for 20-to-24-year-olds (73 per cent), 25-to-34-year-olds (75 per cent) and 35-to-44-year-olds (73 per cent).

The size of the increase in the crucial 25-to-54 age group highlights the devastation being wrought on Australian families by the collapse of the labour market. It is in this group that most family breadwinners are located.

According to the bureau's data, there are now 167,800 families without a breadwinner employed, almost double the 77,600 recorded two years ago. This group includes almost 40,000 families in which both spouses are unemployed and 120,800 families in which the husband is unemployed and has a dependant wife. The number of sole parents unemployed has risen from 28,000 to 37,200.

The picture emerging from these statistics is a grim one. It appears that, as in 1982-83, the main victims of the labour market collapse are older blue-collar workers, many unskilled and most locked into family responsibilities. These people face ever diminishing prospects of breaking back into work as their stint on the unemployment queue grows longer and they face competition from new entrants to the labour market.

The explosion in the number of long-term unemployed over the past few months indicates that many of these workers, displaced at the start of the recession, are still searching fruitlessly for a work a year or more later.

The Government is still struggling to come up with an adequate response to this problem. The worry is that some of them appear resigned to the fact that many of these blue-collared workers will become permanent victims of the recession. In a diminishing market, they will go from being unemployed to "unemployable".

Who lost the jobs

Percentage change in employment Feb 1990 to Feb 1992	
Managers, administrators	-2.2
Professionals	+4.3
Para professionals	-0.7
Tradespersons	-5.6
Clerks	-5.3
Salespersons, personal service workers	-3.8
Plant and machine operators, drivers	-6.1
Labourers & related workers	-4.1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

Where the jobs have been lost

	1990 ('000s)	1992 ('000s)	Change ('000s)
Agriculture, forestry etc	424.3	410.1	-14.2
Mining	102.9	90.6	-12.3
Manufacturing	1,210.1	1,109.3	-100.8
Electricity, gas, water	105.3	108.5	+3.2
Construction	612.8	514.5	-98.3
Wholesale, retail	1,631.9	1,590.0	-41.9
Finance	908.9	880.3	-28.6
Public administration	352.1	358.1	+6
Community services	1,370.8	1,475.7	+104.9
Recreation	591.8	627.0	+35.2

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics

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